

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Youth Prevention is Focus for Through With Chew Week

Through With Chew Week is February 14-20

Encouraging youth around the state to never start chewing or try other smokeless tobacco products is a special focus for the Wyoming Department of Health during this year's Through With Chew Week (February 14-20).

Smokeless tobacco use rates in Wyoming are well above national averages and among the highest in the United States. According to the 2009 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey, 24.7 percent of Wyoming high school males, 6.9 percent of high school females, 8.1 percent of middle school males and 3.7 percent of middle school females reported using chewing tobacco, snuff or dip in the past 30 days.

"Unfortunately, Wyoming youth are being introduced to smokeless tobacco as early as age 10," said Joseph D'Eufemia, tobacco program coordinator with the Wyoming Department of Health. "That's why we're working together with the Wyoming Department of Education to offer a program designed to educate children at this key point in their lives."

"Our goal this year is to provide 5th grade students across Wyoming with the facts they need to make good decisions when it comes to chew," D'Eufemia said. Educational trading cards, posters, "Chew Free Pledge" forms and discussion points for teachers are being distributed to schools around the state.

The trading cards and posters feature colorful creatures intended to represent some of the dangerous ingredients found in smokeless tobacco products. "The trading cards are cool-looking and attention-getting, but also include educational information that we believe can be persuasive to youth," D'Eufemia said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, chewing tobacco contains at least 28 known cancer-causing ingredients such as arsenic, lead and formaldehyde.

Niki Mueller, Wyoming Through with Chew program manager, said "As it becomes more difficult to smoke in public and the demand for cigarettes goes down, the tobacco industry is adapting quickly to the new reality. There are several new products on the market and we're concerned many are meant to appeal to youth."

Mueller said Camel Snus pouches are widely sold across Wyoming with flavors such as "Frost" and "Mellow." "These contain quite a jolt of nicotine and come in a colorful tin that looks like it could hold mint candy," she said. Marlboro Snus comes in flavors similar to those used for chewing gum such as spearmint. The pouches offer a melting "flavor strip."

“Tobacco gel is another new smokeless nicotine option. To use it, you dispense a single press of gel and rub into your skin,” Mueller said. “In promotional materials, the manufacturers claim ‘that cigarette-satisfaction feeling is no more than a minute away!’”

“Despite these new products and their creativity, smokeless tobacco is far from a safe alternative to cigarettes,” Mueller continued. Smokeless tobacco users have an 80 percent higher risk of developing oral cancer and a 60 percent higher risk of developing pancreatic and esophageal cancer, according to a 2008 World Health Organization study.

The Wyoming Quit Tobacco Program, which is part of the department’s Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division, offers low-cost cessation medications and free supportive services such as counseling to help spit tobacco users and smokers quit. Interested residents can call 1-800-QUIT-NOW or log on to <http://wy.quitnet.com> to enroll in the program. People who call or log on during February will be entered to win a \$200 gas card.

For more information on Wyoming’s effort to reduce smokeless tobacco use, visit www.throughwithchew.com.

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